

*A Free Protestant People and a Popish Prince
incompatible.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D,

NOVEMBER the 10th, 1745.

AT THE

BRITISH CHAPEL

IN

St. *PETERSBURGH*.

By *JOHN FORSTER*, A. M.

Rector of *Beer-Crocombe*, in the County of *Somerset*; Chaplain
to His Excellency the Right Honourable *JOHN* Earl of *Hyndford*,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary from His *Britannic*
Majesty to the Court of *Russia*;— and to the *British* Factory.

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LUKE xiv. latter Part of the 23^d Verse.

-----*And compel them to come in, that my House may be filled.*

WE have here a Text, which has been made the constant Plea for Religious Persecution ever since the fourth Century of Christianity.

-----That single Word *compel*, perversely explain'd, and impiously apply'd, has shed more Blood, and made more Havock amongst Mankind, than Plague, Pestilence, Famine, or any other *natural* Evil since the General Deluge. The History of the Christian World supplies us with but too many shocking Proofs of the Truth of this Assertion; and that Master-piece of Villany †, (the providential Escape from which we so lately commemorated) that mighty Mischief, big with the impending Ruin of the *British* Nation, took its first Rise from the same infernal Origin.-----But if I may be allowed to explain the *original* Word, the Fallacy of that impious Gloss will be soon detected.

It is an established Rule in fair Criticism, to keep the *Scope* and *Design* of the Author constantly in our View; and whenever we meet with a Word either of a *doubtful* Meaning, or capable of admitting *different* Senses, (which is extremely common in all Languages)

† The Gunpowder Plot.

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always to explain it in such a manner as to make the Author consistent with himself.-----The Word in the Original, which our Translators have rendered *compel*, signifies not only to *force* and to *constrain*, but also to *tease*, to *urge*, and to *press home* with Vehemence and importunity. If we try this celebrated Passage by this equitable Rule, the fair *unforc'd* Meaning will appear evidently to be this: “ Go and invite all Nations to
 “ embrace my Religion, and represent it to them in
 “ the most amiable Light: Lay before them the Excel-
 “ lency of its Doctrines, and convince them of its
 “ Tendency to promote their greatest Happiness both
 “ here and hereafter; apply both to the Head and
 “ Heart, and *urge* and *press* them to come into it by
 “ the *Force* and *Energy* of *Reason*, and the soothing
 “ Arts of soft *Persuasion*.”

This Interpretation speaks the mild, the engaging Language of the Prince of *Peace*, the great and good Author of Christianity.----When question'd about the Principles of his Religion, he declares it to be founded in *Love* itself: *By this shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one to another*.---When ask'd, whether a Man was oblig'd to forgive his Brother more than *seven* times? *I tell you*, says our Lord, with emphatic Vehemence, *more than seventy times seven*.---So far from resenting Affronts, he enjoins his Followers to return *Love* even for *Hatred*; *Blessings* even for *Curses*; and to *do good* to those very Men who *persecuted and despitefully used them*.---- When his Disciples, heated with a little of *that Spirit*, which has blaz'd out so furiously

furiously since in their unworthy Successors, wanted to call down Fire from Heaven upon the inhospitable and heretic *Samaritans*; our Lord mortifies their *blind Zeal* with this ever memorable Reproof: *Ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy Men's Lives, but to save them.*---When St. Peter's officious Zeal drew his Sword in defence of his betray'd Master; the *ever-merciful* Jesus rebukes the bold Apostle, and demonstrates the *true Spirit* of the Religion, which he came to teach, by *healing* his wounded *Adversary*.---Far from aiming at *Wealth*, at *Grandeur* or *temporal Power*, he laid hold of every Opportunity to *disclaim* them.---When interrogated by *Pilate* about his Kingdom, he affirms in the most *clear* and *explicit* terms, that *it was not of this World*.

Strange then! can Christianity, which breathes the warmest Sentiments of the most diffusive Benevolence; ---whose very *Characteristic*, or distinguishing Mark is *universal Love*;---whose *whole Strain* is Peace, is Harmony, and soft Humanity;--- can that mild, that good-natur'd Religion be forc'd to *patronize* the blackest Treasons, and the most bloody Massacres, and to *give a Sanction* to the savage Horrors of a merciless Inquisition?--- Can the Doctrine of the *humble*, the *disinterested* Jesus, be made the *Foundation* of that *enormous Superstructure* of *Wealth* and *Power*,--- plann'd by *Ambition*,--- rais'd by *Fraud*,--- and cemented by *Blood*; which has spread far and wide its destructive Sway, and made the Nations groan for so many Ages under the iron Hand of Oppression? Alas! convinc'd

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by fatal Experience, there is hardly a Kingdom in *Europe* but what can produce *bleeding* Proofs of this mournful Truth.

Would we unmask Popery, and contemplate it in its native Light; we must consider it not as a regular System of Religion, but as a Scheme of worldly Interest, projected and carried on by the most refin'd Arts of the most wicked Policy.

By what Arts therefore this Infant State grew up to Empire; by what unequal Strain of Policy it *doubly* enslav'd Mankind, and usurp'd unlimited Power over the Soul as well as the Body; shall be the Subject of my Discourse on this important Occasion.

About the fourth Century, when Christianity prevail'd so far as to become the establish'd Religion of the *Roman* Empire, its Professors, who had struggled thro' so many fiery Trials, began now to taste the intoxicating Sweets of Peace and Plenty; and those Vices which had been so long nipp'd and kept under by the Rigour of Poverty and Persecution, shot out a-fresh, and took the deepest Root in the luxuriant Soil of Prosperity.

From this remarkable Period we may justly date the Decline of Christianity.---The Church indeed grew great and flourish'd; that is, the Ecclesiastics *increas'd* alike in Wealth and Power: But alas! Morality *decreas'd* too in the same Proportion.---As they were now enrich'd by the Spoils of Paganism, they began to deck themselves out too with its Plumes †; and *Rome* once more saw a Sovereign Pontiff arise, who as much out-

† See Dr. Middleton's Letter from *Rome*.

shone the former in Pomp and Splendor, as he was superior to him in Wealth and Power.---This *pretended Vicar* of the humble Jesus, instead of being clothed with *his* Mildness and Humility, now blaz'd out with the dazzling Lustre of *triple Diadems*.--- Instead of *serving* his Disciples after the Example of *his meek and gentle* Master, he now saw Monarchs themselves paying servile Adoration at his Foot-stool; and with a Pride second to none but that of the rebel Archangel, trampled upon the Necks of suppliant Emperors †.--- Instead of being contented with the *humble State* of *his unambitious Lord*, he, in contempt of *his* Example, and in *direct* Opposition to *his* express Declaration, *that his Kingdom was not of this World*, erected a new and unheard-of Empire--- A spiritual Tyranny independent of the Civil Magistrate---A kind of Sovereignty as absurd as it is impious. For as all Government was first instituted for the Safety and Happiness of Society, this *Empire, within an Empire* ||; this *double* Sovereignty in Church and State, must inevitably tend to Division and Destruction. Since “two Heads in the Body Politic are as monstrous and inconsistent as they would be in the Body Natural.”

The successful Engines that rais'd this mighty Fabric to that amazing Height, were *chiefly* the imaginary Power of the Priesthood, and that learned Igno-

† The Emperors Henry the IVth, treated in that manner by Gregory the VIIth called *Hildebrand*, and Frederick the Ist and IId by *Adrian* the IVth, *Alexander* the IIIrd, and Gregory the IXth. See *Platina de vitis Pontificum*. *Baronius's Annals*, Cardinal *Benno*, &c.

|| *Imperium in Imperio*.

rance, the Jargon of the Schools.--- The Power of the Priest was gradually strain'd up to such a Pitch of Extravagance, that he was at last vested even with a Share of Omnipotence itself, and by a new kind of Deification, unknown to their Pagan Predecessors, could *impress* Divinity itself on a consecrated Wafer.---The Learning of the Schools, rather the incoherent Dreams of brain-sick Lunacy than the Productions of Thought and Study, by imposing empty Words for solid Truth, and unmeaning Jargon for sound Reason, stifled every Branch of useful Knowledge, put the *Busy* and the *Inquisitive* upon a *wrong* Scent, and diverted them from such Researches as might have prov'd *destructive* to their gainful System.

The *Lust* of Empire is perhaps of all the Passions the most restless and insatiable.--- As Wealth and Grandeur therefore were the darling Objects of the Church of *Rome*, she employ'd every *Art* of Fraud, and strain'd every *Nerve* of Power, to compass her favourite End.---And the *Good* of the *Church*, that impious, tho' specious Mask, that veil'd over her *secret* Views, sanctify'd the most horrid and the blackest Means.

To find out, and apply to the *Foible*, or *ruling* Passion of the People we would govern,--- is one of the wisest and surest Maxims of human Policy. But no Politician ever put *this Rule* in practice with such a *Series* of Success as the Church of *Rome*.--- By soothing the Vices, or striking in with the Passions of weak or ambitious Princes, she not only extended *more* and *more* wide

wide her almost universal Sway ; but shar'd *deeply* in the *Plunder* of their *doubly* fleec'd, and *doubly* enslav'd Subjects.---Are her Votaries of the easily deluded Vulgar, who are caught by *outside* Shew, and the tinsel *Trappings* of Religion ? She can dazzle their cheated Eyes with the Pomp and Splendor of her Worship.--- She can amuse them with the Parade and Pageantry of Processions, and with *devout* Farces, and *religious* Puppet-Shews.--- Are they the Elegant and the Polite ? She can charm their *Taste* with fine Paintings, masterly Statues, and the melting Touches of the most exquisite Music.---Are they the rigid, the weak, or the timorous Bigots ? She can touch their Passions with a masterly Hand ; and elevate the Soul with false Hopes, or depress it with as groundless Fears.--- She can feed the Credulity of Superstition with fabulous Legends, fictitious Miracles, sacred Amulets, and preservative Charms against every Ill.--- She has at her beck Legions of inferior tutelar Deities, to assist at every Exigence, and preside even in the most *servile* Offices †.---She can prescribe bare-foot Pilgrimages, the *Rod* of Discipline *made for the Backs of Fools*, and a senseless Train of four Austerities to indulge the Spleen of the gloomy Enthusiast.

Are they the Men of Pleasure, or the licentious Libertines ? She is never at a Loss for *saving* Expedients. She can *smooth* the Way to Paradise, and retail what Stock they please of heavenly Treasures, in exchange for, what she most covets, their Earthly ones :--- And she can *lull* the *froward* Conscience of the *uneasy* Sinner to *rest* by the *quieting* Opiate of Absolution.----

---Thus Vice may be indulg'd, and yet Heaven Gates stand open ; Morality, made to give Place to Zeal ; and the Laws of God be violated with Impunity.

† See *Middleton's* Letter.

But should a Rebel Son presume to oppose her Doctrines, or call but the least of her sacred Prerogatives in question; she invokes at once the Almighty's Thunder, and directs the vengeful Bolts at the *devoted* Head of the daring Criminal.--- No *Appellations* are then too black; no Execrations too dire ‡; nay, Hell itself with all its penal Fires, is scarce thought a Punishment adequate to the unpardonable Offence.---The unrelenting Demon of Persecution is let loose to spread Death and Defolation thro' the trembling Nations. The Ties of Law and Nature are dissolv'd. Princes are depos'd, and their Kingdoms proclaim'd a Prey to each rapacious Invader ||.---Does she despair of carrying her Point by the bold Attacks of *open* Violence? She can strike home the *secret* Dagger of the Enthusiast, and sanctify the black Assassin †.---Nay, she can make, what she calls, the adorable Body of Christ himself the unsuspected Vehicle to her holy Poison.--- In *Rome's Anti-christian* Gospel the *Beatitudes* are revers'd.--- It is there wrote in *bloody* Characters, *Blessed are the Unmerciful*; and those seem to have the *strongest* Claim to Mercy from God, who in the *Cause* of Holy Church have shewn least to their Fellow-Creatures.

Of all the Senses, Sight is the most excellent, and the least liable to Imposition.--- But lest her Children should *see* Things in a Light inconsistent with her Schemes of Darkness, she artfully persuaded them to shut their Eyes in order to *enlighten* their Faith, and pay her Infallibility

‡ See the Form of Excommunication in the Church of *Rome*.

|| See the History of *Europe* from the 8th Century,---particularly the Persecutions of the *Valdenses* and *Albigenses*; also in *Bobemia*, *Hungary*, *Silesia*, *Moravia*, &c.

† *Henry* the IIIrd and IVth of *France* stabb'd; the one by *James Clement*, a *Dominican*; the other first wounded by *John Chastel*, and afterwards assassinated by *Ravaillac*, both Disciples of the *Jesuits*.

an implicit Compliment of their Senses and Understanding.---“ We read of a whimsical Philosopher † who “ put out his Eyes to give fairer Play to his Reason ; “ but to extinguish the Light of Reason itself to make “ way for Religion, is of the two Projects the *more* wild “ and unnatural.”---As soon as this modest Demand was comply’d with, she obtruded Error upon Error ; and at last summ’d up all in her Master-piece, that Complication of *all* Absurdities in *one*, Transubstantiation ; the greatest Insult that ever yet was offer’d to human Reason.---To suppress the glorious Light of the Gospel, she lock’d it up in an unknown Language ; and thus most effectually confin’d it to the Cloysters of a few Learned Religious, who were too sensible of their proper Interest to produce so dangerous an Enemy.

Thus Learning sunk, Arts expir’d ; and one solid Gloom, one black Night of Ignorance overspread the whole Face of the Christian World.---The Ignorance of those more than barbarous Ages would seem incredible and romantic, had we not authentic Monuments of this melancholy Truth still remaining upon Record||.--- That famous Law call’d the *Benefit of Clergy*, which still subsists in our own Nation, was an Attempt of *Alfred*, the wisest and bravest of our *Saxon* Monarchs, to restore Learning in his Dominions. That great Prince saw the gross Ignorance of his People with a paternal Sorrow. To remedy this Evil, he by that Law forgave various Offences therein mention’d, provided the Offender was able to read but one single Line in his Mother-Language.--- But to shew that Ignorance was not confin’d to *Britain* only ; but extended wide her *leaden* Sway over the rest

† *Democritus of Abdera.*

|| *Rapin’s History of England.*—See the History of the 10th Century, &c.
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of the Christian World ;--- give me leave to produce a remarkable Instance from one of the most celebrated, and (tho' a *Romish* Ecclesiastic) most impartial of her Historians *.

When that rich and powerful Body of Men the Knights Templars were dissolv'd and exterminated, their Grand Master was summon'd before a Consistory appointed by the then Pope for his Trial. Yet that great Man, tho' at the Head of a mighty and numerous Order, partly Ecclesiastical and partly Military; tho' descended from a Family of the first Rank, and educated in the highest Mode of those Ages, alledg'd in his Plea, -- that he was an *unletter'd* Knight; frankly acknowledging, that he was neither *able to write* nor to *read*.

Thus stood the State of the Christian World; till *Leo* the Xth, by reviving Arts and restoring Learning, furnish'd the Enemies of Papal Usurpation with Arms for its Destruction: And that vast Machine, the labour'd Work of Ages, sunk under the Weight of its own enormous Greatness. The shameful Traffic of Indulgencies, where Sin was licens'd, and Heaven itself set up to Sale, *issued out* and *inforc'd* by that very Pope, rous'd Mankind from their fatal Lethargy, and produc'd the Reformation. The Light of that (like that of the first creating Power) beam'd thro' those darksome Regions, dissolv'd the Shackles of Superstition, and bade Reason once more resume her Empire.

Then fair Liberty, with her smiling Train, Freedom of Thought, solid Learning, elegant Arts, unwearied Industry, busy Trade with its Companion Wealth, and its best Support ever-sacred Property, fix'd their lasting Residence in our happy Island. These are the Blessings which either followed or were confirmed to us by the REFOR-

* Histoire de Malte par Vertot.

MATION. These are the Blessings which were still more strongly secur'd to us by the late happy REVOLUTION. These are the invaluable Blessings, cheaply purchas'd by our dearest Blood, which are again attack'd, are again in Danger.---Rebellion once more lifts her impious Head in our native Land, ravages our fertile Fields, and marks her Way with Desolation. Exulting *Rome* once more devours the *well-known Prey* in secret Hope; and our two most powerful, as well as most implacable, Enemies †, menace us with the galling Yoke of Servitude.

Stood but *Britain united*, and collected in herself, she might securely face the driving Tempest, and scatter the hostile Invaders; as she repels the threatening Waves, that spend their idle Rage against her immoveable Cliffs. But what Grief, what Indignation must it raise in every Breast amongst us, to hear that *Britain* still produces some *degenerate* Sons, so *unnatural* as to strike at the Vitals of our common Parent, and so *infatuated* as to *invite* Slavery, and forge their own Chains!

For a *Free* and *Protestant* People to expect a Defender of *their* Faith and Liberties in a Prince train'd up in the *Spirit* of the Court, as well as Church of *Rome*, is an Absurdity that affronts Common Sense.---'Tis to *commit* our Flocks to the Care of Wolves; and to *intrust* our dearest Treasures to the Hands of the Spoiler.

To *exterminate* (what she calls) *Heresy* out of *their Dominions*, is the first fundamental Principle which *Rome* instills into her Royal Children.---Should therefore the Reins of Power be once surrender'd into the *encroaching* Hand of Popery, where is our Security? Where is our Bulwark against her mad Career?---Royal Honour, (will they plead) or Royal Oaths? Alas! weak Defences! Cob-

† *France* and *Spain*.

web Barriers; which are dissolv'd and puff'd away with the single Breath of an all-powerful Dispensation.--- An Oath indeed is a sacred Compact between two Parties, where the Deity is most solemnly invoc'd, not only as a *Witness* to it, but as an *Avenger* of its Violation. But can the most *binding* Oaths that Words can frame, or Wit invent, controul that assuming Power, who *dares* to supersede the *Decrees* even of Omnipotence itself?

That *Faith*, tho' *plighted* in the most solemn Manner, is not to be *kept* with Heretics, has been decreed and confirm'd by the united Sanction of Popes and Councils*; and the History of the later Ages of the Church prove how *religiously* they have adher'd to this perfidious Maxim †.--- Let me trespass so far on your Patience as to produce two Instances which carry with them the strongest Conviction, and are the more *pertinent* at *this* Time, as the Scene of Action lay in *those* very Nations, who are now *leagu'd* together for *our* Destruction.

When the *French* Protestants, after a long and bloody Struggle in Defence of their Religion and Liberties, in the Reign of *Charles* the IXth, were with their Chief † allur'd to *Paris* by the most specious *Baits* of Friendship and Reconciliation:---When the Compact was seal'd with the most sacred *Oaths*, and cemented by a Royal Marriage; yet in those very Walls, sacred to Peace, to Joy, to social and to nuptial Love, our unhappy Protestant Brethren fell the sad Victims of a too-easy Credulity.--- Were we to paint the Horrors of that black Night, Imagination itself would tire in the Description, and Lan-

* Council of *Constance*. 3d and 4th *Lateran* Councils.

† See the Account of *John Huss* and *Jerom* of *Prague*, burnt by Order of the Council of *Constance*.--- Revocation of the Edict of *Nantz* in 1685, &c.

† The King of *Navarre* (afterwards *Henry* the IVth of *France*) married at that Time to *Charles* the IXth's Sister, the Bait that drew the Protestants to *Paris*.

guage sink under us. Yet that complicated Scene of the foulest Perfidy, and the most remorseless Cruelty, was receiv'd at *Rome*, not only with *Approbation*, but with the highest *Marks* of *Applause*; was justify'd by some of their ablest Pens, and handed down in triumph to Posterity on recording Medals||.---The other affords us a *Lesson* equally *instructive*.

When *Charles V.* succeeded to the Crown of *Spain*, he made a solemn Promise in his Coronation Oath, to preserve *inviolable* the Religion of the *Moriscoes*, who then possess'd a Part of that Country. And as the dispensing Power of the Pope was openly and insolently avow'd, it was *expresly* stipulated in that very *Oath*,---that no *Dispensation* should be desired on *his* Part, or *accepted* if offered; and that if he should be prevailed upon to *accept* of *one*, yet that every Act *consequent* upon such a *Dispensation*, should be *deem'd* null and void.----This (one would imagine) was the strongest *Fence* that human Prudence could *contrive*.---Yet, in shameful Violation of this *every Way guarded Compact*, the then Pope † *granted*, and that Emperor *accepted* a Dispensation, *absolving* him from that very Obligation; fully'd the Annals of his Reign with an eternal Blot, and finish'd the Ruin of that miserably-deluded People‡.---So *plyant*, so *ductile* are the Consciences of those *true Sons* of the Church of *Rome*!----Or rather, how can they be said with Propriety to have any Consciences of *their own*, when they are *lodg'd* in the artful *Hands* of a crafty Confessor?

|| Pope *Gregory* the XIIIth made public Rejoicings at *Rome* for that Massacre; and to immortalize the Action as one of the most glorious Events of his Pontificate, caus'd a Medal to be struck with his own Head on one Side, and on the Reverse the Representation of the Massacre, with this Inscription, *Hugonotorum Strages*.

† *Clement* the VIIth.

‡ History of the Expulsion of the *Moors* out of *Spain*.---- Dr. *Geddes's* Tracts.

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These are *indelible Monuments* to all Posterity, of the Behaviour of *Romish* Princes to *those* Subjects, who are so unhappy as to *differ* from them in *Opinion*.---In these tragic Specimens of *Popish* Faith, we may *read* our own sad Destiny, should our Countrymen ever be so lost to Reason, (which Heaven avert !) as to try the fatal Experiment.

To explain the Excellency of our Constitution to *you* (my Brethren) would *in me* be Impertinence ; since *none* perhaps have *more striking* Opportunities of knowing the *real* Value of it than *yourselves*.----To enumerate the Royal Virtues,----to describe the tender Affection, the anxious Concern, and the paternal Care of the *best* of Princes to *you*, would be superfluous. *You* who *feel* the protecting Influence of his salutary Government, as far as Commerce stretches her unwearied Wing.---Our distressed Country now summons to her Aid the Head, the Heart, and Hand of her *duteous* Children, and claims the *just Tribute* of their Lives and Fortunes. And when our Country is at stake, it is the *Part* of filial Piety to *receive* the impious *Blow* aim'd at our Common Mother, and to bleed a *willing* Sacrifice at the devoted Altar.

We indeed, who by the Will of Providence reside in this *distant* Region, are excluded *our wish'd-for Share* of the glorious Danger.---'Tis *ours*, therefore, to testify our just Abhorrence of this unnatural Rebellion.---'Tis *ours* to implore Success on the Arms of our Heroic Friends *now* fighting our Common Battles.---'Tis *ours* to assist with our most fervent Prayers, and best Wishes ; (what *can* we more !) and in our Hearts to *emulate* those immortal, those thrice-happy Patriots, who fall in Defence of that *best*, that *noblest* Cause,---Our RELIGION, our LIBERTY, and our COUNTRY.

F I N I S.

